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Young Rough Riders Weekly

MOST FASCINATING WESTERN STORIES

THE YOUNG ROUGH RIDER'S HANDICAP

OR Fighting the Mormon Kidnappers

BY NED TAYLOR

Ted Strong dashed into the midst of the Danites, firing as he came. Crane recoiled before his weapons.

The Young Rough Riders Weekly

Most Fascinating Western Stories

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THE YOUNG ROUGH RIDER'S HANDICAP;

OR,

Fighting the Mormon Kidnapers.

By NED TAYLOR.

CHAPTER I.

THE PRETTIEST GIRL IN CIMARRON.

"There goes the prettiest girl in Cimarron."

The speaker was the man who kept the post office in the place.

The person he spoke to was a well-built boy, clad in khaki clothes, cut after the military fashion, and wearing a brown sombrero.

The person he spoke about was a girl who was passing down the street.

Her appearance backed up what the man had said.

She had dark blue eyes, yellow hair and a slim, graceful figure.

She carried herself with a grace that is not usually seen in Western border girls.

She looked neither to the left nor right as she passed along the street.

The boy whose attention had been called to her gazed after her for a moment.

"That is Miss Ethel Winters, is it not?" he said.

"Yes, that's Miss Winters. But you are a newcomer here. How is it that you know her?"

"I met her some time ago."

"Before she came here?"

"Yes."

"She used to live away up in the San Juan Mountains, with her old father, who was a hunter and trapper."

"That is where I met her."

"Not many white men have been up in that part of the country. They say that it is nothing more than a wilderness."

"I spent some time there with a couple of friends of mine," said the boy. "It was, as you say, a wilderness; but all the same it was well worth traveling through."

"You must be one of the three fellows I heard about who traveled up there. You must be Ted Strong, the young rough rider."

"My name is Ted Strong; some people call me the young rough rider. Now that you know my name, you might see if there is any mail for me here."

"Ted Strong! Is it possible? Well, I am proud to meet you."

Before the postmaster went inside to look through his

letters, he insisted on shaking hands with the young rough rider several times.

He had often heard of him, for Ted was a boy who was famous through a great part of the West.

A little over a year before our story opens, he had come West to run a ranch, and had organized an association of boys known as the young rough riders.

The young rough riders had been so successful in handling the cattle on the ranch and disposing of the bad men and cattle rustlers who had attacked them at the first, that their leader had become famous all through the border.

Only a short time before he had been on a hunting trip in the San Juan Range, which lies to the north of Cimarron and runs up into the borders of Colorado.

While there he had met with Ethel Winters, and had helped her to escape from the clutches of a villainous mountaineer who had wanted her to become his wife.

He knew that she had friends in Cimarron, and it was a surprise to him that she was living there.

He would have liked to have seen her, but at present he had no time for any social pleasures whatever. He had come to Cimarron on business.

The business was in connection with a railroad which a number of Eastern capitalists had planned to build to the northward of the town.

Ted Strong, having traveled through that country, had important information that they were anxious to know.

The letter that he now opened told him that one of the railroad men would arrive at the station in Cimarron, and would like to meet him there.

Ted Strong glanced at his watch and saw that it lacked but a few minutes of the time when the train was scheduled to arrive.

He took his leave of the postmaster, and hurried away in the direction of the station.

In the meantime the girl who had been pointed out as the prettiest one in the town continued on her way up the street, unconscious of the fact that she had attracted such attention, or that the young rough rider was near her.

She was going in the direction of the house of her cousin, where she was staying. It lay up at the far end of the village.

She had been on a trip down to the general store of the town, which was situated at the other end, close beside the railroad station.

She had not gone far, however, when another figure stepped out and joined her.

This was a boy of about the same age of the young rough rider. But the age was the only thing in which the two resembled each other.

The young rough rider was muscular-looking, and burnt as brown as a berry from constant exposure to the sun.

This boy was well enough built, but he had not the appearance of a boy who was in good training.

His face was a little fat, and his eyes were not particularly bright.

He had red hair and a rather pale countenance.

He was dressed in very fine Eastern clothes, and he had a conceited look about him that showed that he thought a great deal of himself.

He lifted his hat when he saw the girl, and bowed politely.

"Going for a walk this morning?" he said. "Won't you let me join you?"

Ethel Winters drew her skirts closely about her, and looked at him very coldly.

"I'm just on my way home," she said. "I have taken my walk already."

"Well, let me walk up to the house with you."

"I'm in a hurry."

"That doesn't matter. I can walk quick, if you don't want to go slowly."

Ethel would have been very glad to get rid of this boy, but she did not see a way to do so.

She had met him in the past. His name was Clif Jackson, and he was the son of wealthy parents, who had come to Cimarron to spend some of his money and see all that he could of Western life.

He would not have stayed in that town so long, had it not been for Ethel Winters.

He had been greatly attracted by her beauty, and since he had met her for the first time, had been trying to force his attentions on her.

That she had always treated him coldly and avoided him whenever it was possible had not seemed to discourage him in the very least.

"Fine morning, isn't it?" he said, falling into step with the girl, and suiting his pace to hers.

"It's a good morning for a ride. Why don't you get your horse and go for a ride up the mountain trail?"

"I will, if you will come with me."

"I can't do that. I have to do some work this morning."

"What work have you to do?"

"I have to help get dinner."

"Pooh! All that sort of thing ought to be left to servants."

"Supposing you have no servants."

"A girl like you ought to have servants. If you would only come East sometimes, you would see what life really is."

"The life out here has been quite good enough for me so far."

"Won't you come for a ride with me this morning?"

"I told you that I couldn't go out this morning."

"Well, then, come out for a drive. I can hire a dandy buckboard at the hotel."

"Thanks very much, but I can't."

"Look here, Ethel," said the boy, drawing a little closer to her. "You are not treating me very nicely. What have I done to offend you?"

"Nothing. You haven't offended me. I can't go out this morning—that is all."

"That isn't all. I know what it is that is the matter. It is that time that I tried to kiss you when we were in the woods together. That's what makes you mad yet, isn't it?"

"I'd rather not talk about that at all."

"But that is what's the matter. I have apologized for it. I can't do any more, can I?"

"You can cease talking about it."

"Look here, Ethel, you know what it is that has kept me in the town here so long."

"I'm sure I don't."

"You do. You know very well that it was because I wanted to see you. Can't you treat a fellow decently?"

"I've told you often that you ought to go back to school, as your parents want you to."

"Cut that sort of talk out. You know very well that I am going to do what I please."

"I know that you ought to do what your parents want."

"You know that I am staying here on your account."

"I am sure that I don't want you to stay."

"Well, I am going to stay. And I think that you ought to treat me better."

They had left the town now, and were going along a lonely road.

Jackson edged closer to the girl, but she always edged away from him, so that at last she was out at the extreme side of the road.

She turned on him now, with an angry light flashing in her eyes, making them a darker blue than usual.

"I think that you have come far enough with me now," she said.

"What's that?"

"I want to be left alone. I want to walk the rest of the way by myself."

"You mustn't get mad," said Jackson, with a laugh.

Ethel clinched her fists tight and stamped on the ground with her little foot.

"I am mad," she said.

"What are you mad at? What have I done?"

"What have you done! You have been bothering me this way ever since I have been living in Cimarron. I thought I would be happy here, but I was happier when I lived like an Indian up in the mountains with my father. I won't stand it any longer. You have no right to bother me this way. It is a shame. If Ted Strong were here, he would not let you bother me this way."

"Ted Strong! He's not here. He left the town some time ago. Tell me—has he written to you?"

The girl did not answer.

"He hasn't written to you. You might as well give up thinking about him. It is well known that he flirts with every girl he meets."

"He doesn't!"

"Yes he does. You would like to think that he doesn't. He flirts with them all, and he is delighted when he is able to make a fool of one of them——"

"How dare you!"

"As he has with you."

Clif Jackson was speaking in the most sneering, sarcastic manner that he could assume. What he said was having its effect on the girl.

She had colored to the eyes, and it was easy to see that she was aflame with rage.

"Clif Jackson!" she said, turning toward him, and looking him in the face. "After this I don't ever want to see you or speak to you again."

"Too busy thinking of Ted Strong, eh? You might as well give up all ideas of him."

"I'm not thinking of Ted Strong. I don't want to be annoyed by you any longer. You have no right to persecute me this way. I won't stand it."

Jackson tried to smile, but could not.

The way in which the girl spoke angered him, although he did not wish to show his rage.

"I apologized for trying to kiss you before," he said.

"I told you to say no more about that."

"And I'm not going to try it again."

"You had better not!"

"I'm not going to try it. I'm going to do it."

As he said this, Jackson leaped forward and caught the girl in his arms.

His move had been so sudden and unexpected that she could not elude him. She was a girl who had lived a great deal in the open air, and who was much stronger than the usual run of girls.

Jackson had not calculated on this fact when he caught hold of her.

She struggled furiously with him, pulling at his hands to make him let go of her.

"Let me go!" she cried. "Get away from me! You'll suffer for this!"

"I'll not let you go!"

"You will."

"After I have kissed you."

In trying to get away from him, she dragged him along across the ground.

He still clung fast to her and tried to hold her.

She struck him in the face, and the shock of the blow made him let go his hold for a moment.

She darted out of his grasp, and he started after her.

His face was stinging from the effects of the blow, and he was half blinded by it.

In rushing forward, his foot caught upon a stone, and he fell prone on his face.

Ethel heard him fall, but did not turn around to look at him.

She thought that he would be on his feet and after her in a moment.

She ran away as fast as she could go, and scarcely slackened her pace till she arrived at her cousin's house, some distance away.

She was out of breath when she got there, but she said nothing about what had happened.

She thought that she had outrun Jackson, and she determined not to go out alone until she was sure that he had left the town for good.

In the meantime Jackson had lain still where he had fallen.

He had been thrown headlong on his face, and he lay in a heap, motionless.

There was a red stain on his forehead and a few drops of blood had darkened the dust of the road.

The boy's head had struck a sharp stone in the path, and he had received a slight scalp wound.

He was stunned, and for the time being he might have been dead, for all the apparent life there was in him.

He was lying thus when a clean-shaven, wiry man, dressed in black, came up the path and stopped in astonishment at seeing the prostrate form on the ground in front of him.

CHAPTER II.

STEVE CRANE.

The man gave a long whistle between his teeth, and then stooped down and, seizing the boy by the shoulder, turned him over.

He gave vent to another low whistle when he saw the face of the youth.

"As I live and breathe!" he muttered, "if it isn't that kid that I guided through the mountings on a hunting trip, a while back. I wonder what he's doin' in this here town? An' I wonder what knocked him out this way? He looks like he had fallen down in a fit an' cut hisself. He's as pale as a sheet. Too many of them cigaroots that ther young fellers smoke nowadays. They don't allow them there things among ther saints, an' it's a gol darned good thing, too."

The man set himself to restore the boy to consciousness, and as the youth was not seriously injured, he did not have very much trouble in doing this.

After the man had rubbed his hands for a moment and slapped him roughly several times across the face, a little color showed in his cheeks and he gasped.

He did not open his eyes.

"Gol darn ther kids thet they raise nowadays," said the man. "They hevn't got no more strength than a sick hen. I'll bring him around, though."

His method of resuscitating the unconscious youth was not one that would have been looked upon with favor in an up-to-date hospital.

It was successful, however.

It consisted in grasping a tight hold of the patient's ear and pinching it with all the power there was in his long and bony fingers.

He did not have to pinch long.

The boy writhed for a moment on the ground, and then, with a wild yell of pain, sat up and looked around him.

He seemed bewildered.

He put one hand up to the injured ear, and glared at the man who had brought him to.

"What are you doing?" he cried. "You hurt my ear."

He put his hand to his forehead, and drew it away wet with blood.

He stared at it stupidly.

Then his eyes brightened.

"I remember now," he said. "I fell and hurt myself."

"Stand up, an' don't lie there like yer was shot."

"What are you?"

"Don't yer recognize yer old friend? Has that rap on the head knocked all the wits outer yer?"

Jackson stared at the man.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "You are Steve Crane—the guide to the San Juan Mountains. What are you doing here?"

"Get up on your feet, an' we'll talk."

Jackson scrambled to his feet rather unsteadily.

"I need a rag to tie up my head," he said.

"Sho!" said Crane. "You don't need no rag fer a scratch like thet. Let the blood dry on it. It'll keep ther cold out an' heal it in no time. Here! Take a drink of this."

He drew out a flask and handed it over to Jackson.

The boy took a short drink from it, coughed and sputtered a good deal, and then declared that he felt better.

"That's good," said Crane. "You mustn't let a little thing like that rap on the head bother you."

"What are you doing here?"

"I jest droppped around on a leetle business."

"I thought that you would be keeping away from these parts after your scrap with Ted Strong, the young rough rider. You know that you were accused of trying to run off with a girl."

"Was I? How is it that I find you here? Who soaked you on the head?"

"No one. I fell on a stone there. I was staying here to have a little fun with that girl that we saw in the mountains."

Crane's face grew very black.

"You young whelp!" he began. Then he checked himself.

"I forgot that she was a friend of yours," said Jackson.

"Well, she was a friend of mine, but she went over to ther side of ther young rough rider. But is she still livin' in this town?"

"Yes, she's still staying here."

"Whereabouts?"

"Up at the next house along this road. What do you want to know for?"

"I came here about thet girl. I wanter see her."

"What about?"

"I'll tell yer. Her father allers promised me thet ther gal would become my wife. She refused herself because ther young rough rider showed up here an' she got stuck on him. But that nonsense is knocked out of her head. Since I left here I hev j'ined the Mormon church."

"Joined the Mormon church?"

"Yes; I'm a travelin' missionary fer ther Mormons. It's a soft snap, besides workin' as a guide or huntin' fer yer livin'. Utah is a fine place, all right."

"You don't mean to say that you expect to convert Ethel Winters to the Mormon faith?"

"Never mind what I expect."

"I've heard of Mormons coming into other States and kidnaping women," said Jackson.

"Look here!" said Crane, starting forward fiercely. "The less of that sort of stuff that you says, ther better. Does yer understand?"

"What do you mean?"

"Just this——."

From beneath the tails of his long, black coat, the Mormon missionary whipped a gleaming revolver.

Before the boy could raise a hand, it was pointing straight at his head.

"Look out with that gun!" cried Jackson. "What do you want to cover me that way for? What have I done to you?"

"Nothing, so fur."

"Are you crazy, then? Put down the gun. It might go off."

"It won't go off unless I want it to. I wanter speak ter yer kinder solemn, an' I have jest drawed this here weepin out sorter ter emphasize what I have ter say. Understand?"

"I understand. Say whatever it is that you have to say quick; I don't like that revolver."

"I'll come ter ther p'int, all right. It is jest this: I don't want yer tet say a word about my bein' here ter anyone."

"Of course not—if you don't want me to."

"I don't want you to. I've got a leetle scheme on hand, and if you butts in on it you will get a bullet sent through you, understand?"

"I won't block your game or say a word to anyone. I promise. Now, for Heaven's sake, lower that revolver."

Crane dropped his weapon, and returned it to his hip pocket.

"You see what is comin' fer yer, in case yer gets too talkative."

"I see," said Jackson. "But we know each other well. There is no fear that I will get too talkative. Your scheme, I suppose, is to get Ethel Winters out to Utah?"

"Yes, an' yer kin help me a leetle in it if yer will."

"I'll help you. But at present I am going back to the hotel. I want to get washed up."

"Have you seen Ethel lately?"

"Not in two or three days. But that next house is hers."

"All right, I'm goin' up thar now. I'll see yer ternight. So long!"

Crane turned and walked up the road in the direction of the house.

Jackson started off in the direction of Cimarron.

He walked along the road until he was sure that Crane was out of sight.

Then he came to a standstill. His face was dark with rage.

"He plans to kidnap her and take her out to Utah with him," he muttered. "And he is ready to shoot me if I don't help him in his plot. I'll help him, all right. I'll help him in a way that he little expects. I'll get the girl from him. I'll pretend to join in with him in his little scheme, and at the last minute I'll rescue her from him. He talks about shooting. When the shooting comes off, there won't be any talk about it. There will be action. And I'll be the person to do the shooting. Crane thinks he can scare me. I think that I can use him for my own purposes. We'll see which of us is right."

The face of the boy had changed a great deal while he was indulging in these reflections.

There was a set expression to the jaw that showed that in spite of his appearance of softness, Clif Jackson could be determined and relentless when his mind was made up.

If Crane could have seen him now, he might not have thought it was wise to have him help him in his schemes.

Jackson turned around, and, setting off at a brisk pace, was soon back to his hotel.

Up in his room he washed himself and brushed his clothes.

Then, lighting a cigarette, he strolled down to the barroom and treated himself to a cocktail.

After this he walked out on the porch of the hotel.

There were several people there. Two of them, stout, prosperous-looking gentlemen, were just starting for the afternoon train out of Cimarron.

They were shaking hands and bidding good-by to a well-built, frank-faced boy, who was clad in a khaki suit and wore a gleaming revolver in his belt.

Jackson thought that there was something familiar in his figure, but he could not place him.

He watched the departing gentlemen step down on the street, waving farewell to the boy as they did so.

Evidently they thought a great deal of him, for they treated him with a degree of respect which is generally only accorded by men of that type to people of their own age.

The boy, after seeing them depart, wheeled around and started to enter the hotel.

Clif Jackson caught sight of his face, and gasped with amazement.

It was the young rough rider who had just concluded an interview with a party of railroad men.

He did not see Jackson, as Jackson had quickly drawn into the shadow of the door when he recognized him.

As he stepped into the hotel, Jackson slipped through the door that led into the barroom, so that the young rough rider did not see him at all.

CHAPTER III.

TED STRONG GOES CALLING.

Ted Strong had concluded his business with the railroad men, and had nothing to do that afternoon.

He intended to stay in the town of Cimarron for a day or so, anyway, as he had been commissioned to make certain deals with the owners of property which the railroad men wished to buy.

He was through with business for the day, however, and he determined, after lunch, to go up and see Ethel Winters.

He had caught a fleeting glimpse of her in the street that morning, and she had seemed even prettier than when he had seen her before in the San Juan Mountains.

Accordingly, after lunch, he washed and combed his hair, brushed up his khaki clothes until they looked as spick and span as though they had just come from the military tailor, and started off for the house where Ethel was staying.

He learned that she was living with her cousin, a widow, whose name was Mrs. Meeber, and who owned considerable property in the vicinity of Cimarron.

Ted had to see Mrs. Meeber anyway, in regard to the land which the railroad people wished to get hold of, so that he was combining business and pleasure when he was paying a visit to Ethel Winters.

He set out for the house in a buckboard, with a good team of grays, taking the same road that Clif Jackson had taken when he walked with the girl that morning.

On the way to the house, Ted noticed a man who passed him far over on one side of the road.

This man was dressed in a long, black coat and a slouch hat, and he turned his face away from the young rough rider, as though he wished to avoid him.

Ted looked at him curiously.

There was something about his figure and the manner of his walking that was familiar to him, but he could not think how it was.

He finally concluded that the man was some one whom he had noticed about the town of Cimarron when he had been there before.

He dismissed the subject from his mind, and gave it no further thought.

When he arrived at Mrs. Meeber's house, he found that Ethel was surprised and delighted to see him.

"You are not the only friend who has turned up," she said. "I met another, but I didn't want to see him at all. I was glad when he went away."

"Who was it?" asked Ted.

"Steve Crane," answered Ethel. "The man who was a guide in the San Juan Mountains—the man that you fought with, don't you remember?"

"How long is it since he was here?"

"He just left a little while ago."

"Was he dressed in black?"

"Yes; with a long coat and a black, broad-brimmed hat. He looked like a minister."

"What is he doing now?"

"He says that he is in the mining business, and has settled down to live some place north of here—he didn't say where."

"And what is he doing here?"

"He says that he came here to see me."

"Oh— he did!" smiled Ted. "And what was it that he wanted to see you about?"

Ethel flushed, and cast down her eyes so that the young rough rider could see only the long lashes that swept her cheek.

"He said—I don't know—I mean that he said that he wanted me——" she hesitated for a moment, and became silent altogether.

"I see," said the young rough rider. "He wanted to marry you?"

"He said he did."

"You are not going to do it, are you?"

Ethel looked at the boy and smiled. She had quite recovered her composure.

"Why, you don't care whether I do or not," she said.

"Oh, yes, I do," said the young rough rider. "Tell me—you are not going to marry him, are you?"

"No, of course not," said Ethel, looking frankly at Ted. "You know that I can't bear the sight of him. And besides, I could never marry anyone——"

Mrs. Meeber entered the room at that moment, and the conversation came to an end for the time being.

Ted was introduced to Ethel's cousin. She was a woman of middle age, with a sweet face and gentle manner.

Ted soon explained to her what his business as repre-

sentative of the railroad was, and it did not take long to arrive at an understanding in regard to the land.

Mrs. Meeber was very glad to sell it. She had been left a widow, with a good deal of real estate and very little money, years before.

She had been forced to mortgage some of her property in order to live.

But as the price which the railroad company offered for the land was a very liberal one, she saw that its sale would leave her in very comfortable circumstances.

After this business was concluded, the young rough rider invited Ethel and Mrs. Meeber to go for a drive in the buckboard which he had brought with him from the hotel.

There were a pair of spirited grays hitched to it, and he knew well that around Cimarron there were numbers of beautiful drives that could be taken in a buckboard.

Mrs. Meeber excused herself, thanking Ted for his invitation, and saying that she did not feel well enough to go out for a drive that afternoon.

Ethel accepted gladly.

Her heightened color and sparkling eyes showed how delighted she was that the young rough rider had called upon her, and what pleasure she expected on her drive with him.

It did not take her long to pin on a soft little sombrero which she wore, and put on a little military coat which her cousin had given her a short time before.

Then she was ready, and the young rough rider helped her into the buckboard.

Mrs. Meeber waved them a farewell from the porch, calling out that they were to be back in time for supper.

They started off at a spanking trot, the young rough rider keeping the grays well in hand, but at the same time allowing them to make good time.

"Isn't this grand?" said Ethel, looking about her with bright eyes. "It is a long time since I had a drive."

"Do you like driving?"

"I love it."

"Here, then, take the reins."

He handed the reins over to the girl, who took them with evident delight.

At first the horses, recognizing that another hand was on their reins, broke and tried to run.

Ted kept a close watch on the girl, but did not offer to take the reins from her.

He wanted her to have the pleasure of controlling the horses, if she could do it.

He thought that she could, and he was right.

At first the swaying of the buckboard and the mad dash of the animals made her cheeks pale.

Then her red lips set into a firm line, and she began to struggle with the horses, trying to pull them down under control.

She did not lose her courage in the least, but spoke to the horses soothingly.

It was not long before she had them going at an even trot once more.

"Bravo!" said Ted. "That was done splendidly. You needn't be afraid of driving any team in the country."

"I was a little afraid at the first," said the girl, flushing and smiling with pleasure.

"You didn't show it, if you were."

"I didn't want you to see it. I didn't want you to think that I couldn't drive."

"No danger of my thinking that now," said Ted; "but swing the horses round to the left there. We will go up the mountain road."

Ethel had many times before looked at the scenery along that road, for she had lived high up in the hills above Cimarron for years.

But never had it appeared so beautiful to her as it did that afternoon.

The sky was clear and cloudless, and the distant peaks were of the purest and most heavenly blue and white.

The nearer summits were clothed in dark pine forests, and up through the trees wound the mountain trail, a serpentine ribbon of white.

It was up this trail that they were driving.

The horses had now settled down to a steady trot, for it was not a slope at which even these mettlesome horses would have liked to move at anything faster.

It was delightfully cool up there.

The wind was perfumed with the breath of the pine forests, and seemed as stimulating as wine.

As they drove up through the trees, the young rough rider talked to the girl, telling of his early adventures in the West when he had first started the ranch, of his forming of the organization of the young rough riders, and of the terrible fights that they had had with cattle rustlers in the old days in North Dakota.

He told her of all the boys who had belonged to the association of the young rough riders, and how they always stuck to each other through thick and thin.

Ethel listened, thinking that it was the most interesting thing in the world.

It sounded more like something she might have read about in a romance rather than anything that had actually happened.

"Oh, dear!" she said. "I wish I were a boy."

"Why?" asked Ted.

"Because then I would join the young rough riders – but no, you wouldn't let me, would you?"

"I don't know," said Ted, gravely. "We might."

"But I'm not a boy, anyway, so that it doesn't matter."

"I'll tell you a secret," said Ted. "I don't believe that you would ever guess it. I would much rather have you as you are."

"I've never had any of the splendid adventures that you fellows have had. I have never been on a ranch."

"You have had a lot more adventure than falls to the

lot of most girls. Living up there in the mountains, you must have seen plenty of hunting of all kinds. I know that you are a splendid shot with a rifle."

"You beat me at that the first time that I ever saw you. I've had lots of fun, though, hunting game up there. Sometimes it was whole weeks when I didn't see anyone except my father, and when I did see anyone it was that hateful old Steve Crane."

"I wonder what he was doing here?" said Ted. "Do you think he left the town?"

"I don't know—I'm afraid not. He was angry when he left me."

"Angry at what?"

"At me. He wanted me to agree to marry him, you know. I couldn't do that. He said when he went out that he would find a way of bringing me to terms."

"You think that he is staying in the town?"

"Yes; I think so. I think that he will try and see me again. I don't see why he should persecute me this way."

"I'll find a means to put a stop to it. As soon as I see him, I'll make it clear to him that he'll have to let you alone."

"Oh, Ted! Be careful! He's a bad character. He doesn't know that you are here, but he hates you, and if he can find any way of doing you an injury, he will do it. He said to me that he was laying for you, and that sooner or later he would get you. Please be careful. I have heard him threaten you more than once."

"People who are threatened very much generally live a long time," said the young rough rider. "I am not at all afraid of Crane—bad and all as he is."

"There is another enemy of yours in the town, too, so that you must be careful."

"Who is that?"

"Clifford Jackson."

"What? Is he here yet? What does he stay here for so long?"

"I don't know. He has been bothering me a good deal. I ran away from him this morning. He wouldn't let you alone."

"He'll let you alone as long as I am in the town," said Ted. "But go easy here around these turns—the road is very steep here. Perhaps I had better take the reins. It is harder driving up here."

Ethel turned the reins over to the young rough rider. They were high up on the mountain side now, and the path on which they were driving was very narrow.

On either hand there were steep slopes, covered with forests of pine trees and firs, and the path itself was in a sort of shadow from the fact that it was overhung to a large extent by the boughs of the trees.

The path was rocky, uneven, from the fact that water poured down it whenever there was a heavy rain, and full of sudden turns.

It took careful driving, and Ted had just pulled his horses to a walk, to round one of the turns, when they both reared up suddenly.

A man had leaped out of the bushes, and caught at the bridles.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MORMON KIDNAPERS.

The man who had leaped out of the woods so suddenly was clothed in a long, black coat, and wore a broad-brimmed black hat.

At one glance, however, the young rough rider recognized him.

It was Steve Crane, formerly the guide to the San Juan Mountains.

As he clutched at the reins, other figures appeared in the road behind him.

They were dressed like himself, in long, black coats and black hats.

They were bearded, for the most part, and there seemed to be an unearthly pallor about their faces which their dark garb made still more noticeable.

At a glance, the young rough rider judged that there were three of them besides the guide, but there was no time to count them then.

Ethel screamed at the sight of Crane and the sudden rearing of the horses.

The carriage was brought to a standstill for a moment, but it was only a moment.

Ted Strong arose from his seat and snatched the whip from its resting place.

With a swishing blow, he brought it around and landed it on the face of the man who was holding the horses.

It blinded and stung him so that he let go the reins and fell back with a loud cry of pain.

Another stinging lash sent the grays bounding forward.

"Catch it, boys!" yelled Crane, to the others. "Don't shoot! We might hit the girl."

Ted saw them leaping for the necks of the horses.

The buckboard was jumping and swaying from side to side.

It was all that Ethel could do to keep her seat by holding fast to it by both hands.

The young rough rider was standing up, but he seemed to keep his balance wonderfully.

He saw the men springing for the heads of his horses, and as they leaped forward, he leaned forward, too, and lashed out with the whip.

Ted's ranch work had taught him how to use a quirt or a whip with telling effect.

He put this knowledge into operation now.

He stung the men across the eyes with the hissing lash.

He aimed with each blow that he struck, and he did not miss his aim.

The men who leaped for the heads of the horses were blinded as Crane had been.

Had the young rough rider struck them anywhere else, they would not have minded the pain.

The desperate character of their attack showed that they were men who would stop at nothing.

But the blinding blows across the eyes made them sightless for the moment, and hence incapable of doing anything.

One fell backward into the bushes.

Another dodged to one side, but in time to prevent the wheels of the buckboard from passing over him.

A third, in his blind agony, ran madly in front of the vehicle.

The pole struck him in the shoulder and knocked him down.

For a moment he was under the horses' feet.

The carriage went up on one side, as a wheel passed over him.

His screams of fear and pain resounded in the ears of the young rough rider.

Ted kept his balance wonderfully.

There was no need to urge the horses forward.

They were going at a mad run now.

The blows that they had received from the whip had thrown them into a panic, and the young rough rider could do nothing to hold them for a moment or so.

They whirled around a bend in the road with such suddenness that it seemed as if the buckboard were going over

This was a good, thing, from one point of view.

It enabled the young rough rider to get speedily out of the reach of those who had attacked the carriage.

They were all far behind it now, around the turn of the road.

It was dangerous from another point of view, however, for the road was narrow and full of sharp turns.

Ted Strong knew that there was a sharp, downward slope in front of him, not very far away, and that if he did not check the animals before he came to that, the buckboard would be wrecked, and both of them would be either injured or killed.

The boy did not give a thought to the men who had attacked the carriage.

That danger, whatever it was, was out of the way for the present.

All his attention was directed to the madly galloping steeds in front of him.

He did not even sit down, but, bracing one foot against the dashboard, steadied himself and bore back on the reins for all that he was worth.

At first the horses paid no attention to his tugs.

Ted could see the hill down which they were almost sure to dash, only a little distance ahead of him.

He knew that they must be checked before he reached that.

He was not thinking of his own safety at all.

He himself could have leaped into the bushes at the side, and escaped without anything more than a few scratches.

It was the girl beside him!

She must be preserved from injury, no matter what the cost!

Muttering a prayer to Heaven between his set teeth, the young rough rider took a turn of the reins around each of his hands, and commenced to saw on them.

This was a method that he would not have tried at all had not the case been desperate.

It often, instead of serving the object aimed at, throws the horses into a panic and makes them run all the faster.

But this time the young rough rider was successful.

The horses slowed their pace decidedly.

They pulled with their heads, as though they were striving to get the bits between their teeth, but their pace was slower.

Ted felt that they were coming under control.

Part of their run had been uphill, and they were winded and breathing heavily.

Now was the time for a strong, steady pull.

The young rough rider pulled hard, using all the strength of his powerful arms.

The reins seemed to cut into his hands, and the muscles of his biceps ached with the strain.

He set his teeth, however, and when he had reached what might have been supposed the limit of his strength, he nerved himself for a still greater effort.

This last effort was a success.

The horses moved more slowly now.

From a run they came down to an ordinary gallop. Then they were going at a canter, a trot, and finally a walk.

At the very brow of a steep descent they came to a standstill, trembling and sweating.

One glance down the steep hill that lay in front of him told the boy that it would have meant sure death to race down there.

At the bottom of it was a sharp turn that he never could have made with the buckboard going at that speed.

And on the other side of the road there was a cliff over which wagon and horses would surely have tumbled.

That would likely have meant death for all concerned.

They had been pulled to a standstill just in time, for if they themselves had wanted to stop while running down that steep hill, they could not have done so.

Ted relaxed his grip on the reins, and turned to speak to Ethel Winters.

She had been silent throughout the runaway.

The boy feared that she had fainted, but up to the [illegible] moment it would have been suicidal for him to [illegible] lifted [illegible] eyes from the road in front of him for an instant.

As he turned to speak to her, he saw that she was not there!

The seat beside him was empty!

CHAPTER V.

CLIFFORD JACKSON.

Ted Strong was dumfounded.

He remembered that the last time that he had glanced at the girl was when he had leaped to his feet to lash at the men who had grasped at the horses' heads.

He had noticed her then, sitting fast in her place and holding on to the seat to keep from tumbling off.

Since that moment he could not look to see where she was.

He had supposed that she was still there in her place, but there was not a moment when it would have been safe for him to take his eyes off the rocky path down which the ungovernable horses were dashing.

Where was she?

Had she been dragged off the carriage by the men who had attacked it?

Had she fallen out owing to the rocking of the buckboard?

Who were the men who had rushed at the vehicle?

What was Crane doing with them?

Ted had never seen any of these black-clothed men before, and that long coat, cut after the Prince Albert fashion, was a new costume for Crane, the guide.

The young rough rider wasted no time in trying to answer any of these questions out of his head.

He knew that it was useless to do so.

Whether she had fallen out or been dragged out, Ethel Winters was in danger and in need of assistance.

It was not like the young rough rider to stand still, puzzling and thinking, when this was the situation.

Action was more in his line.

"There is only one thing to be done," he mused, dropping to the ground. "That is to drive back slowly along the road, and to be on my guard all the time."

His hands were sore and blistered from the pulling of the lines, but he paid not the slightest attention to that.

He grasped the reins and turned the team around.

Then he leaped into the buckboard once more.

The horses were so quiet and played out now that he could drive them with one hand easily.

"It's a queer piece of business," he muttered, as he shook the reins and started the horses off again. "Pray Heaven that she has not been injured when she fell off."

This time he held the reins in his left hand, and drew his revolver with his right and laid it across his knee.

The people who had tried to stop the carriage might still be lurking somewhere around.

The young rough rider was not to be taken by surprise a second time.

He scanned the hills on either hand as he drove along, and looked eagerly along the road for some appearance of the girl.

But she was not to be seen. His heart was beating fast now with uneasiness.

During the whole mad runaway he had been quite cool and collected.

The thought of danger to himself made the young rough rider steadier rather than anything else.

But the fact that Ethel was missing filled him with all sorts of fears.

He remembered her sweet eyes, her merry smile, the trust and friendship that she seemed to place in him.

He set his teeth, and muttered between them.

"If she has come to injury in any way," he said, "those fellows will pay dearly for it. Crane was the leader—I could see that. I will hunt them down if it takes years to do it."

At one time a tree trunk lying by the side of the road for a moment took on the form of the girl.

With fast-beating heart, the young rough rider drove up to it. In another place a clump of bushes looked disturbed as though she had fallen among them.

Then he came to the place where the road was marked with hoofprints of several horses, as well as the impressions left by the feet of men.

The young rough rider came to a stop here. It was the spot where the attack had been made upon him.

It had taken him a great deal longer to get back than it had to travel in the other direction.

The young rough rider's heart sank when he arrived at it. It meant that the girl had disappeared.

If she had fallen off she would have been seen by him before he reached this point.

And if she had been unhurt, she would surely have walked on after the buckboard, or waited to see whether or not he would have returned.

This meant that the men who had leaped out upon him had her in their grasp.

Perhaps one of them had dragged her out of the carriage when he was whipping his way through their midst.

The young rough rider had done all that a human being could do to help save the girl, but at the same time he felt guilty.

He felt that he was to blame in some way.

There was a stern look on his face. He threw the reins loose on the necks of the sweating horses, and gazed about at the road.

There were the tracks of other horses besides his own there. Some of the tracks ran into the trees at the side of the road.

There a bunch of tracks could be seen running off down the road in front of him.

The young rough rider, experienced as he was at trailing, could see all this without getting down out of the buckboard.

"They were mounted," he muttered. "There is no doubt that they were mounted when they came here, and that they concealed their horses in the trees there, out of which they leaped at us. I see their tracks going straight in front of me. That is the way that they left. I will follow them. I'll cut one of these horses loose, and ride after them while they are hot. I'll leave the buckboard and the other horse here. It doesn't matter. If they have Ethel in their hands, I must get after them right away, before they can get a chance to cover their tracks. This is some plot of that villain, Crane. He wanted Ethel to marry him. He would have forced her into it had it not been for me."

Ted leaped from the buckboard, and, picking out the freshest and most spirited of the two grays, started to set it free from the traces.

A sound behind him caused him to start suddenly.

With lightning speed he turned, and drew out his revolver, which he had restored to his belt when he jumped out of the buckboard.

In the middle of the road, mounted on a handsome black horse, was Clif Jackson.

He had evidently just turned the bend of the trail that led back to Cimarron.

He was looking down at the young rough rider with a peculiar expression on his pasty conntenance.

"You might as well put up that gun," he said. "It is a friend. You must be awfully nervous when you are out alone on these roads."

Ted noticed the sneer that there was in the fellow's voice.

He lowered his weapon, however, and thrust it back into his belt.

"Did you pass any men as you came up the trail?"

"Pass any men?" repeated Jackson, in an insolent tone.

"Yes; pass any men. You understand what I say."

"I don't remember any."

"None at all?"

"Not that I saw. But what has happened to you?"

Ted looked steadily at the boy.

There was a gleam in Jackson's eye that he did not like.

As he looked into it, a strange feeling shot through him.

It was the feeling that Jackson knew something about the disappearance of Ethel Winters.

There was no reason for him to suppose that, beyond the manner of the lad, but still he felt sure of it in his own mind.

"I was attacked by a party of men here," he said, watching narrowly as he spoke.

Jackson affected the appearance of great surprise.

"Attacked!" he said. "What was it? Robbers?"

"I don't know who they were. All I know is that they are going to pay dearly for this. Every one who had anything to do with it will suffer."

Ted said this between set teeth, and looked straight at the boy in front of him.

There was something in the appearance of the young rough rider at that moment that made him look actually terrifying.

It was seldom, indeed, that the boy was angry.

But now he was determined to save the girl from whatever fate it was that threatened her, and determined to run down the villains who had carried her away in this cowardly manner.

That determination showed in his eye in a flash that made Jackson feel uncomfortable and turn his own eyes away.

He turned a shade paler, also. There was a menace in the voice of the young rough rider that made him feel uneasy.

Ted noticed the pallor and the fact that the other would not meet his eye.

He was convinced that Jackson was acting a part.

But if this was so, Clif Jackson was a good actor.

A moment later he had recovered complete control of himself. He looked the young rough rider full in the face.

At the same time an expression of the deepest surprise filled his own countenance.

He knew that if he was to fool this boy, he would have to be very careful.

He simulated the greatest surprise that he could.

"This is surprising!" he said. "Are there robbers in this part of the country?"

"I don't know whether there are robbers here or not," said Ted. "But there are scoundrels, and that I am sure of. They carried off a girl."

"Carried off a girl! What do you mean?"

"I mean what I say. They took a girl out of this buckboard and ran off with her."

"Were you in the buckboard?"

"Yes; I was in it."

"And you let them?"

"I couldn't help it. The horses bolted, and while I was fighting with them and trying to hold them in, she disappeared. I thought at first she might have fallen out of the seat. But now I think that she has been carried away."

"What a terrible thing to happen! Who was it that carried her off?"

"That's what I don't know, but it is what I am going to find out before long."

"Who was the girl?"

"Ethel Winters."

"Ethel Winters! I think I remember that girl."

"I think you do."

"Her father used to be an old trapper up in the San Juan Range.

"Yes, and for some time past she has been living in Cimarron."

"I didn't know that. I haven't seen her in a long time. But it is terrible to think she could be carried off that way. Who could have done it, I wonder? I have only seen her once or twice in my life, but I thought she was a nice girl. It must be a terrible thing for you, as it happened when she was in your care."

"It is a terrible thing, but it is going to be still more terrible for the people who had a hand in it."

"You intend to chase them and find her?"

"Yes."

"Do you think that you can do it all by yourself?"

There was a sneer on the face of Clif Jackson, but it turned to a look of fear as the young rough rider stepped up close to his side.

"Yes," he said, in a low tone, "I think that you can help me to find her."

"I'm sorry, but I have to get back to Cimarron now."

"No you haven't. You are going to wait a moment or so."

Clif Jackson looked decidedly alarmed now.

There was something about the young rough rider that he feared.

He tried to turn his horse around, but Ted caught it by the bridle, and held it fast.

"What do you mean?" he said, trying to shake the rein loose from the grip of the young rough rider.

"This is what I mean!" said Ted.

As he spoke, he seized Clif Jackson by the ankle, and with a single motion heaved him out of the saddle

Jackson had been expecting nothing so sudden as this.

He was tumbled over on the ground, landing on his shoulder and falling over on his back.

For a moment he lay there sprawling, while Ted quieted his horse, which had become a little alarmed.

He tried to scramble to his feet.

"What do you mean by that?" he cried.

"Here is what I mean," said Ted, leaving the horse and grasping him by the coat collar.

"You know more about this than you pretend to know," he said. "You tried to deceive me. I thought that you were lying from the first, but I was sure of it when you said that you had not seen the girl since the time that you left her in the mountains. I know that you knew she was here in Cimarron."

Jackson got on his feet, and managed to pull himself free from the grasp of the young rough rider.

He stood facing him now.

The fall from his horse had put him in a towering rage.

Ted himself was enraged over the disappearance of the girl, or he would not have acted in that way.

"You let me alone," said Jackson. "You have no right to touch me."

"I'll let you alone when you tell me what I want to know.

"I want to know where that girl is, and what you had to do with her disappearance."

"Well, you won't find out from me. I don't know anything about her."

"You do, and you'll have to tell."

"I won't tell. You think that you are an awful lot. When you come here and try to bully me around this way, you will find that I won't stand for it. Let me alone."

"I won't let you alone till you tell me all that you know about Ethel."

"About Ethel! You think you are awfully smart. You think that she is stuck on you, do you? Well, you will never see her again."

Jackson was edging away from the young rough rider, and moving toward his horse.

Ted followed him.

"Keep away from me," said Jackson, warningly.

"Tell me what has happened to Ethel?"

"I won't!"

"You will."

"Do you think that you can make me? You are making the biggest mistake in your life if you think that. You make me tired with your conceit. You come around here and try to bully me. You threw me off my horse by taking me by surprise, and you think that you are such a handsome fellow that all the girls fall in love with you. Ethel didn't have any use for you. She dropped off that buckboard and gave you the slip just for fun."

Ted made a rush for the boy.

At the same time Clif thrust out his hand.

It held a pistol.

He fired right in the face of the young rough rider.

CHAPTER VI.

JACKSON TELLS—THE ATTACK OF THE MORMONS.

The young rough rider was blinded by the flash, and felt a stir in his hair as the bullet sped through it, within a fraction of an inch of his head.

He dived forward, ducking his head.

It was that duck that saved his life.

If he had not lowered his head at that moment, the bullet would have struck him square in the center of the forehead.

He grasped the hand that held the revolver, and by holding it tight, prevented Jackson from firing at him again.

Jackson was in a rage that was more like insanity than anything else.

He cried out in his furious temper and kicked and fought with the young rough rider like a wild animal.

For a moment his fury was so great that it was all that Ted could do to hold him in check at all.

He struck Ted in the face with his free hand, kicked at him with his feet, and pushed him backward across the road.

At the same time he was trying to point the revolver at the young rough rider's body.

Ted gave all his attention to this hand.

He knew that Jackson was insane with fury, and that he would kill him if he got the chance.

He grasped his wrist with both hands, and held on like grim death, pointing the weapon up in the air and holding it that way, so that if it was discharged it would do no harm.

The rage of Jackson gave him the strength of a madman.

He crooked his leg around that of the young rough rider and tripped him up.

They both rolled over on the ground.

Jackson was above.

He planted his knee on Ted's chest and struck him a smashing blow on the point of the jaw. For a moment the senses of the young rough rider seemed on the point of leaving him.

His head swam.

The strength that he was holding onto the revolver with relaxed for that moment.

With a yell of triumph, Jackson pulled it out of the clutch of the young rough rider.

He pointed it at his head. Ted was looking into the muzzle.

By chance, Jackson had struck him a blow on the jaw that had partially stunned him. Now he intended to shoot him dead.

Ted could see the weapon brought to bear on him. He could see the look of deadly malice in the eyes of the boy who was kneeling on his chest. There was murder in those eyes. The young rough rider could see it as plain as day.

He did not seem to have any strength left in his limbs. The blow had paralyzed and weakened all his muscles for the moment.

Jackson's hand was unsteady, and he could not aim properly, although he was so close.

"I'll kill you now!" he panted. "I'll kill you now, and leave your body here to be eaten by the wolves and prairie dogs. No one ever travels this way. No one will know what has become of the young rough rider."

"You haven't got me yet," said Ted, clutching the revolver again.

He had had time to recover his strength a little.

He twisted his body now, and threw Jackson to one side. He pulled the revolver out of his grasp, and drove the butt of it into his face.

Jackson's burst of fury had left him and he was weak.

The young rough rider seemed to have a steady strength, that increased rather than weakened as he fought.

They still struggled; but it was a struggle of a different nature now.

The young rough rider had all the best of it.

He bore Jackson down on his back, and held him there, powerless.

"Now," he said, looking down in his face, "you tried to kill me, but failed! There is nothing in the world to prevent me from choking you to death where you lie."

"Let me up!" gasped Jackson.

"You tried to kill me. I can kill you now."

"Let me up."

"I don't need a revolver. See!"

The young rough rider grasped him by the throat, and sent his strong fingers deep into the flesh.

Jackson screamed, and then his cries grew fainter. His face took on a darker hue. He gurgled and gasped in his throat.

It seemed as if he were really being choked to death.

Ted relaxed the pressure for a moment, and looked down into the face of the boy who had tried to kill him a moment ago.

His eyes, generally so kind and soft in their expression, were hard and merciless now, when Jackson looked into them.

"Let me live!" he pleaded, in a faint voice, as soon as the pressure on his throat was relaxed.

"Why should I let you live?" said the young rough rider.

"Don't be a murderer."

"You were willing to be a murderer."

"I was crazy. I did not know what I was doing. Let me live. I will tell you about Ethel Winters."

"What do you know about her?"

"I know where she is?"

"What else?"

"I know who carried her off. I know the plot. Let me up, and I will tell you all."

"Are you telling the truth?"

"I swear that I am. I am telling the truth, if ever I told it."

Ted looked down into his eyes, and saw that for this time, at least, Jackson was telling the truth.

He relaxed his grip on his throat and stood up.

Jackson tried to get up. He was so weak that he staggered and fell again. The furious struggle had exhausted him terribly.

The only mark that the young rough rider had to

t he had been in a fight was a hole in his which the shot that Jackson had fired at him had made.

He helped Jackson to his feet, and allowed him to sit down on the side of the buckboard. The red-haired boy was as pale as a ghost, and was shaking like a leaf.

Ted faced him, and looked him full in the eye:

"I did not intend to kill you when I had you in my power then," he said.

"No?" said Jackson, faintly.

"No; I intended to frighten you. And I think that I did it, too."

"Yes."

"But you are not out of my hands yet. I want you to tell me all that you know concerning the disappearance of Ethel Winters."

"Yes; I will tell you."

"You had better. Do you know what will happen if you don't?"

"No."

I'll tell you. The knowledge may assist you in telling the truth. You attempted to take my life?"

"I was mad. I did not know what I was doing."

"You know very well that you may go to jail for that. How would your father like to hear that you were in jail for attempted murder?"

"But you cannot put me in jail."

"But I can. You are powerless now. I can take you, as a prisoner, down to Cimarron and make the charge. I can show the bullet hole in my hat as a proof."

"You would not do it."

"I would do it in a moment if I found that you were not telling me the truth. If you are concerned in this attempt to capture and run away with this girl, you are a criminal. If I took you down to Cimarron and told them that you were, you would be lynched."

"I know that they might do that. But it was not my plot."

"Never mind. You know what may happen to you if you do not tell the truth. Now, answer my questions and answer them to the point. Who were the men who captured Ethel?"

"They were Mormons."

"Mormons?"

"Yes; they were a party of Danite elders, who came to the town here for the purpose of getting converts."

"And why did they attack Ethel?"

"Sam Crane was their leader. He is in love with her. He is using the Mormons simply as tools."

"And he told you about it?"

"He told me about it because he wanted my help."

"He told you that? What did he want you to do?"

"He wanted me to decoy the girl out in some way. That is what he wanted me for. He wanted me to take her out driving or something like that and get her up in the hills here so that he could carry her off."

"I begin to see the plot now. He knows this place pretty well. That is how he managed to lead these Mormons up here so readily."

"He saw her go out driving with you. I was with him."

"And what then?"

"We headed straight for the hills. He had his Mormons up there. They did not like to show themselves in the town."

"And then they attacked the carriage. What were you doing there?"

"He said it might be a good idea for me to meet you and find out what you said about it. He thought I might put you off the track."

"You succeeded nicely, didn't you? But where has he gone?"

"Up in the hills a little further. He intends to keep her there for a while and smuggle her to the West, when the hue and cry over her disappearance has passed away."

"He does, eh? And I suppose that he intended you to help to put people on the wrong track. I think that for taking part in this plot you deserve punishment."

"I couldn't help it."

"You couldn't help it, eh? You are a worse scoundrel than Crane. I will see that you get all you deserve. You pretended to care for the girl, and, when she turned you down, you tried to get even with her in this villainous way."

"I was mad at her."

"You scoundrel! I will see that you get the punishment you deserve."

"I told you all that I know."

"Yes; and I made no promise to you. You will go to jail for this."

"Please let me go."

"You deserve all that you will get."

"I did not mean to have her kidnaped. Crane would have killed me if he thought that I was treacherous."

"What did you plan to do, then?"

"I intended to set her free myself."

"And then take the credit for rescuing her."

"I suppose so."

"Do you know where they have taken her to?"

"Crane did not tell me. But I think that I know."

"Where?"

"I know that Crane has a cabin up in the hills. I am almost sure that is where he is gone."

"How is it that you do not know for sure?"

"He did not trust me altogether. He knew that I was fond of Ethel myself."

"Fond of her, you villain! A nice kind of fondness! Where is this cabin?"

"Up in the woods near the hill of the three pines."

"Can you go to it?"

"I think so."

"Then you will have to lead me there. And at the first sign of treachery on your part, I will tie you up and take you back to Cimarron. Can we make the trip in a buckboard, do you think?"

"Yes, it is an easy road."

The young rough rider glanced at Jackson in silence. He saw that the youth was thoroughly cowed, and realized how serious his position was.

There was no doubt that he was telling the truth, now.

Ted did not think that he would again try to escape him.

He turned to the buckboard and started to rearrange the harness.

At the same time, a dark figure stepped out of the woods behind him. Jackson saw the figure, but it was too late.

Before he could cry out the young rough rider was felled to the ground with a blow on the back of the head.

Three other dark figures stepped out of the trees and threw themselves upon him.

The figures were those of Crane and three of his Mormon followers!

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE HANDS OF THE MORMONS.

The struggle that followed was short lived, but while it lasted it was of the cyclonic description.

All four men had piled themselves on the young rough rider.

At the very first he had been knocked down.

The blow had not stunned him; but before he could get on his feet, his foes were upon him.

For a moment the fight was indescribable in its fury. Although taken by surprise, the young rough rider struck out with hands and feet.

One black-coated Danite got a smash in the face that sent him staggering.

Another received a kick in the pit of the stomach that knocked him flat on his back.

But Crane and the remaining men had seized Ted by the arms.

There was not time to draw a weapon.

They had him by the wrists before he could make a second movement, after the first wild blows that he had struck.

He got on his knees, but they threw themselves upon him and tried to bear him down again.

All three rolled over and over on the ground.

Then the man who had been smashed in the face joined the fight.

It was silent, but it was deadly.

Not a word was spoken on either hand.

The combatants had no strength to waste in breath.

The Mormons knew that they were fighting with a boy whom it was next to impossible to down.

Ted was fighting with that grim determination and desperate courage which never deserted him.

He seemed a match for all three of them, although he could not shake himself loose.

Then the man who had received the kick in the stomach got on his feet and joined the fight.

For a moment there was an indistinguishable mass of arms and legs as they all piled on top of the boy.

Then the heap quieted, and the Mormons, battered and bruised from the beating that the young rough rider had given them, arose to their feet.

They arose one by one.

The boy lay where he was.

They had bound him hand and foot with ropes that they had evidently brought with them for this purpose.

The young rough rider was left lying flat on his back, without the power to stir a limb.

Up to this time, Crane and his men had not paid the slightest attention to Jackson.

Crane turned to him now with a black look on his face.

"You see what happened to your friend, here?" he said.

"Yes," said Jackson, who was still so weak from the effects of his struggle with the young rough rider that he could scarcely stand upright, but leaned against the buckboard for support.

"You saw what happened to him. That is what is likely to happen to you."

"What did I do to you?"

"What did you do to me? Do you suppose that I trusted you? You fool!"

"I don't know whether you trusted me or not," said Jackson, in a weak voice.

"Well, I didn't. I took you into my confidence, but it was because I thought that I would need you."

"I didn't ask to be taken in?"

Jackson was deathly pale now.

It seemed that when the young rough rider was not threatening him, that Crane was.

He seemed to be between the devil and the deep sea.

He realized now into what a hole his evil deeds had led him.

He saw no escape for himself.

"You were taken in," said Crane, with an ugly snarl. "I didn't trust yer, though. I told yer to go up ther road an' see ther young rough rider when he got back. But I stayed in ther bushes. We took ther gal around by the road, but she's in a cabing in ther woods not very far from here. I come back here, and I heerd yer talk ter ther young rough rider. I saw ther scrap, too. So did my friends, here. We was lyin' in ther bushes thar,

mighty snug. I saw yer give yerself away ter ther young rough rider."

"I didn't tell him anything till I had to."

"Till yer had to! Yer acted like an old woman. Ther way yer talked showed that yer knew more than yer said."

"I tried to fool him."

"Yer did, eh? Yer didn't do it very well."

"I couldn't help his attacking me."

"Yer could have helped lettin' him see that yer knew a lot."

"I didn't tell him."

"No; but yer grinned at him in a way thet if he hedn't been a mortal fool he would have got wise ter yer."

"I didn't intend to."

"Yer didn't intend! Yer a gol dinged fool! He jumped yer, an' I was glad ter see it."

"I couldn't help that."

"Yer might have put up some kind of a fight."

"I did."

"I saw ther kind of a fight yer put up."

"I had the best of it at the first."

"Yes, why didn't yer keep it? Yer might hev plugged him through ther head, but yer didn't have ther nerve."

"You saw that I did my best."

"I saw yer git licked. An' then I saw yer give ther whole game away like a sneaking coward."

There was a flash of anger in Jackson's eye.

He was recovering his strength. He stood up on his feet.

"There is no reason why you should browbeat me this way," he said. "I won't stand it."

"What will yer do?" asked Crane, sneeringly.

"Clear out of here."

"An' split on ther game some more?"

Ted had been listening to the conversation with the greatest interest.

He knew that if Jackson could get away, there might be hope for himself and the girl.

Otherwise, he felt that there would be none.

He thought that there was some good in Jackson in spite of his weakness and overbearing conceit.

He had been hoping that Jackson would make a dash for liberty, for he felt sure that Crane intended to make a prisoner of him also.

He had been waiting for Jackson to make a start. Now he felt that he could wait no longer.

"Get out of here, Jackson!" he called from where he lay. "Get on your horse and make a run to Cimarron. Try and undo some of the harm that you have done."

Jackson comprehended the command and saw the wisdom of it.

He made a leap for his horse. At the same time Crane rushed for him.

He made a wild grab just as Jackson got into the saddle.

The horse started off at a gallop, but Crane, skillfully dodging the flying hoofs, leaped out and caught him by the foot. Jackson tried to hold onto the saddle and shake himself free. It was useless.

Crane had fast hold of him and was pulling in one direction.

The horse had leaped away in another.

Jackson was yanked out of the saddle and fell to the ground.

He landed on his hands while the horse galloped off, its hoofs echoing wildly among the hills.

Crane dropped the boy's foot and looked at him with a sneer on his face.

The three Mormons, all bearded and all wearing black coats, had sat themselves down on the buckboard.

They were pale, grave men, and they did not laugh at Jackson's plight as Crane did.

Jackson got on his feet and Crane caught him by the collar.

"The young rough rider is clever," he said, "but yer didn't act on his advice quick enough."

"Let me go," said Jackson, struggling with him.

Crane only fastened a tighter hold on his collar and laughed.

He was a good deal stronger than Jackson under ordinary circumstances, and the experiences that Clif had passed through that day had weakened him a good deal.

"Let you go?" said Crane. "I guess not! You are coming with us for the present. You will be lucky if you get away when we leave this part of the country. As fer ther young rough rider—he dies—that's all thet is ter it! He hes give us trouble enough already. He dies!"

Lying on his back, bound hand and foot, the young rough rider heard these ominous words from Crane.

He knew that the ex-guide, who had suddenly appeared thus as a leader of Mormons, was not a man who made remarks like that in a jesting spirit.

Crane was a man of few words, and, whatever he said, he meant.

"Here," said Crane, "Brother Drone, would you mind handing the rope?"

One of the Mormons stepped forward with a lariat, and a moment later Jackson's hands were bound behind his back.

"This feller would surely split on us if he got a chance now," said Crane, in an explanatory way. "We will take him up to the cabin an' lock him in there when we leave. After that, he may get out; but it will be too late fer him to go after us."

"The other youth?" said Drone, in a deep voice.

"The other youth is dangerous."

"What? After we have taken the maiden away from here, what harm can he do?"

"He can do a whole lot of harm. He is not no ordinary kid, I tell yer that."

"He is young, but he is strong."

"Strong he is—Strong by name and strong by natur. He would git on ther trail arter us, an' he'd foller us all ther way ter Salt Lake City."

"In the land of the Latter Day Saints, he could do nothing."

"Couldn't he? Yer would find that he would raise a fuss thet wasn't easy quieted. He'd go ter ther United States Government an' ther would be another investigation into ther Mormon Church."

"He is a fine young man," said another of the Mormons. "Perhaps he himself would be willing to join the true faith."

"I wouldn't trust him."

"You know, Brother Crane, that it is our mission to get converts—men, but more especially women. If this young man joined us we could succeed better in getting other maidens that we have planned to bring into the true faith."

"Ask him an' see if he wants ter," said Crane. "I'm in favor of wipin' him out right away."

The Mormon went over to the young rough rider and looked down into his face.

Ted had heard a great deal of the Danites, as a certain sect among the Mormons are called.

He knew that they practiced polygamy still in Utah.

He had heard that the Mormons made a practice of carrying off women from all parts of the country, but he had never believed the story.

He thought that such practices were a thing of the remote past.

But now he saw that it was true.

Crane had determined to marry Ethel Winters—by force if necessary.

He knew that he could not manage to carry her off by himself, but he also knew that if he had the support of the Mormon Church he would be able to do it.

For that reason he had joined the Danites.

Ted Strong had listened to the conversation that had just taken place with a good deal of anger.

When the pale face of the Mormon looked down into his he felt a feeling of great disgust for the cowardly sect that made a practice of kidnaping defenseless women.

"Young man," said the Mormon, "you have the choice of two things. They are to die or to join the true Church. What is the answer?"

"Answer quick, too," growled Crane.

The young rough rider felt certain that no matter whether he was willing to join the Mormon Church or not, Crane would try to have him killed. Crane was afraid of offending his companions, or he would have insisted on his death then and there.

"Do you swear to join the Mormon Church?" said the Mormon.

"I won't swear anything of the kind," said the young rough rider.

"What?"

"You heard me."

"You refuse?"

"Emphatically."

"You know that the alternative is death."

"I don't know anything of the kind. I know, however, that I would rather die than join the society of such wretches and villains as you. That is my answer."

The Mormon did not seem to be angered in the slightest degree at what the young rough rider had said.

His pale, sallow face did not change a line.

He stepped back to the side of the road.

"Have your way with the prisoner," he said, turning to Crane. "He has refused the light. He has renounced the true faith. He deserves death—and a speedy death."

"I'll give him a speedy one, all right," said Crane. "He won't have ter worry none about that. A leetle way along ther road here there is a steep cliff. We will pile him in ther buckboard an' take him up there. When we chuck him offen thet place he'll fall fifteen hundred feet afore he touches ther bottom of ther gulch. An' when he does touch it, ther won't be nuthin' left of him but a pulpy mass."

A moment later, Ted was lifted and put in the buckboard.

Clif Jackson was lifted into it, too.

Crane got into the front seat and took the reins. At the same time the Mormons led several horses from the trees and mounted. They all carried shotguns, sawed down, across the pommels of their saddles. Wrapped in their long, black coats, with their pale, bearded faces and dark hats, they looked ghostly figures.

Crane's horse was hitched to the back of the buckboard and the cavalcade started.

One Mormon rode behind, and one rode on either side of the vehicle.

The two boys were tied so securely that they could scarcely move a muscle.

A plan of escape seemed absolutely out of the question.

If they had been untied, the deadly shotguns of the Mormons would have brought them down in an instant.

The buckboard jolted along over steep roads for some time. Tied as he was, and lying on his back on the floor of the vehicle, the young rough rider had little idea of which direction he was going.

He knew that they made several sharp turns and passed up a trail that was overshadowed by trees—that was all.

He lay on his back perfectly silent, saying not a word.

With Jackson it was different.

The events of the day had been too much for the nerves of this boy.

He seemed to be frightened half out of his wits.

He talked incessantly, begging Crane to set him free and to spare his life, and promising to do anything that he wanted.

"I'm willing to join the Mormon Church. I'm willing to do anything at all," he cried. "Don't kill me. Don't murder me. I cannot bear to die. Set me free. Let me join the Mormon faith. I will help you to get the girl out of here. I will help you to capture other women."

"We want no cowards in the Danite band," said one of the three Mormons. "None such as you may be with us."

"But spare my life, then."

His voice rose to a wild shriek.

Crane rode in the front seat of the buckboard and looked down at him.

"Shut up," he said. "I won't listen ter thet gibberish any longer."

He struck the boy heavily across the face with the back of his hand.

Clif Jackson groaned and became quiet.

"That's better!" said Crane. "Now don't let me hear no more yells from you. I told you that you wouldn't be killed."

"But set me free! Please set me free. These ropes are too tight. They are cutting me. Set me free!" pleaded the boy.

"Yer'll have ter stand ther ropes fer ther present. We haven't time ter fix yer as comfortable as yer might wish."

"Set me free, then."

"We'll set yer free when we get good an' ready. I told yer thet yer wouldn't git killed, although yer such a coward as ter deserve it. For giniral wuthlessness, I never met yore equal. We'll lock yer up fer a while, an' yer'll git free some time."

"I'll starve to death locked up there. My parents are expecting me to leave the town this afternoon."

"I cain't help thet. Yer parints'll be disappointed, I expect. Shut up, now!"

Jackson started to speak again, but Crane struck him savagely.

He became silent, although the young rough rider knew that he was still half crazed with fear.

A few moments later, the buckboard came to a standstill.

"Here we air!" said Crane. "Now brothers, yank this here young rough rider outer the rig an' let him see where he is."

Rough hands grasped the young rough rider.

He was lifted out of the buckboard and set upon his feet.

He had an opportunity to look about him.

The sight that he saw was one that would have paled the face of anyone.

He was on the very edge of a precipice around which the narrow trail wound.

Below him was a sheer drop of hundreds of feet.

There were valleys and mountains stretched out before him for a great distance.

The cliff at his feet was a sheer drop.

It was down this that Crane intended to drop him.

Crane, himself, stood beside the young rough rider and leered into his face.

"Yer has been fightin' me fer a long time, rough rider," he said, "but ther end has come now. Yer dies here, and there is northing more to it."

"There is a whole lot more to it," said the young rough rider. "You will find that this is only the beginning of it."

"Yer has pluck anyways," said Crane, in a half-admiring tone. "But yer is too much of an enemy ter me ter be let live."

Ted was able to turn his head around, and he glanced at the three Mormons.

Their pale faces seemed to wear no expression whatsoever, save one of steady gloom.

They were strange men, indeed.

To the young rough rider they seemed more like ghosts than men.

"Are you going to allow me to be murdered this way?" he said, addressing them. "I had heard that the Danites, in spite of all that has been said against them, made a pretense of Christianity and had some moral law."

There was not the slightest change of expression on the faces of these men.

"You will find that you are making a mistake," he said. "I have many friends. Murder will out. This will be a bad thing for you and your religion."

"Silence!" said Drone, in a low, impressive voice. "Your doom is sealed. You have dared to fight against the saints of Mormon. By the law of the Danites, you must die!"

"Come on boys," said Crane, grasping the shoulder of the young rough rider. "Heave him over."

CHAPTER VIII.

WITHIN AN INCH OF HIS LIFE.

"Say, brothers," said Crane, as the four grasped hold of the bound form of the young rough rider. "There is something in what this feller says. If his body is found here an' it is thort that he was done away with this way, there will be trouble."

"What does it matter?" said one of the Mormons. "The rules of the Latter-Day Saints must be obeyed. The young rough rider has already the ban of the death angels upon him."

"That's right, he must die, all right. But we must make it so that no one comin' up here ter look fer him will think that he was murdered. I have a plan."

"What is it?" said Drone.

"We must take these ropes offen him afore we pitch him down."

"It is dangerous. He will struggle."

"Let him struggle. We'll throw him overboard, all right. Then there will be nothing ter show that he didn't come ter his death by fallin' off by hisself. Ther won't be no bullet marks an' ther won't be no ropes ter show thet we had anythin' ter do with it."

"I see no reason why we should fear discovery. The saints fear no one."

"I do, I tell yer. This here young feller is known through all ther West. He has a hull lot of friends who will flock to look fer him. Ther'll be a hue an' cry all over ther country if it is discivered thet he is murdered. He's too well known ter be snuffed out without raisin' a disturbance. Ther government at Washington will take it in hand."

"All right," said Drone. "Do as you suggest. But it is dangerous."

"Be all ready ter push him over when I cuts ther cords," said Crane.

The young rough rider felt the hands that held him take a tighter grip upon him.

He nerved himself for a last struggle, although there seemed not the faintest hope for him.

He knew that it would be no use to plead with Crane.

Crane was anxious for his death.

The young rough rider had fought him and he wanted to kill him.

As for the Mormons, they seemed to have neither mercy nor any other feeling.

They had described themselves as death angels, and the young rough rider had no doubt that they belonged to this famous committee of their church which was formed for the purpose of killing such people as had incurred the displeasure of the Latter-Day Saints.

The young rough rider knew that the death angels never failed to carry out the decrees of the Church.

He felt the cords at his feet loosening, and at the same time Crane straightened up.

Now was the time!

The young rough rider lashed out with one of his feet.

It caught Crane in the stomach.

Crane was taken by surprise.

He fell backward.

For a moment he seemed to be falling over the edge of the cliff, which he had planned to throw the young rough rider over.

He managed to save himself by clinging tight with his hands, and he pulled himself up and collapsed on the ground.

Ted was paying no attention to him.

He had wheeled around after delivering the kick.

His feet were free, although his arms were still bound.

He dived with lowered head, straight at the three Mormons who held him.

His head struck one in the chest, and he staggered backward and fell

The other two clung to the young rough rider and pushed him over toward the edge of the cliff.

They were tall and strong.

They stopped the charge of the young rough rider and lifted him clear from his feet.

"Over with him!" gasped one. "Carry him to the edge and drop him over."

Ted was swung through the air.

He was on the very edge of the cliff now.

He kicked at the Mormons, striking one of them on the knee.

At the same time a rifle cracked far up among the trees.

The Mormon dropped on the edge of the cliff.

Another rifle cracked and the other Mormon let go his hold on the young rough rider.

Ted was left on the very edge of the cliff.

His hands were bound, but he managed to roll over to a position of safety,

Crane was on his feet now and rushing toward him, but there was another crack.

He stopped. He had been shot in the arm.

The three Mormons had turned to face the wooded hill that rose behind them.

The shots had come out of the trees.

They drew their revolvers and started to fire.

But there was nothing to fire at.

A dozen sharp cracks came out of the trees.

A perfect hail of bullets fell about the four.

They were panic stricken.

They fired a flying volley into the trees and then scrambled for their horses.

One of them made a kick at the young rough rider to push him over, but Ted had rolled further away.

Another rattling fire came out of the trees.

This time it was from a point further down.

It seemed as if the whole woods were filled with men.

"They have us surrounded," cried Crane. "This is the only way out."

He clapped spurs to his horse and was off down the trail.

The other three were after him.

There was another report or two as they turned a nearby bend.

They were out of sight now, and the young rough rider heard their hoofbeats grow fainter and fainter.

He looked at the trees to see who it was that had fired thus opportunely and had come to his rescue just in time.

He had been watching the direction of the bullets, and he felt sure that it was one or two men at least who had done all the firing.

The Mormons did not notice the in[illegible] panic but the young rough rider had seen that almost all the shots were fired from one point, and that they never came in volleys.

They came as fast one after another, as a repeating rifle could be worked, but no two of them were discharged at the same time.

He was at a loss to know who the person was but when a figure did appear he almost cried out in his surprise.

It was Ethel Winters!

Her hair was hanging loose about her shoulders.

Her hat was gone, and her short walking skirt was torn with briers.

Her face was flushed and glowing with triumph, and her blue eyes were sparkling.

In each hand she carried a rifle.

She came straight for the young rough rider, and a moment later he was free. She had cut his bonds.

"There, Ted," she said, "I waited to the last moment, but now you are safe."

Her eyes seemed to be swimming with a light that the young rough rider had never seen in them before.

She swayed toward him.

Ted had her in his arms, and had kissed her full on the lips before he knew what he was doing.

Her lips met his, soft and warm, and for an instant her arms clung close about his neck.

Then she drew away from him, covered with blushes and turning her eyes in every direction, save to meet those of the young rough rider.

"Ethel!" said Ted, still beside himself with surprise and the thrill that the soft warm lips of the girl had sent through his whole being, "you saved me!"

"I came just in the nick of time," said the girl, smiling upon him.

"Yes, but how? I thought that you were a prisoner."

"I was a prisoner, but I escaped."

"From the cabin where they put you?"

"Yes."

"How did you do it? Tell me."

"It was easy. They forgot that I was a mountain girl. They did not remember that I had been brought up in these hills here, hunting and trapping. I know them a good deal better than Steve Crane does, although he thinks that he knows their every pass."

"How did you get out?—and how did you get here?"

"It was easy, Ted. I am stronger than ordinary girls. My father used to call me a tomboy. I guess I am more of a man than some boys I know"—she cast a disdainful glance at Jackson, who still lay bound in the buckboard which the Mormons had left behind in their flight. "There was a window in the cabin. It was high above my head. They never thought that I could reach it. But I did. I leaped up and caught it by my hands. I have been living indoors in Cimarron so long like a civilized woman that I thought that I might have forgotten how to do it."

"You haven't forgotten?"

"No. I tore my dress and lost my hat. My hair all came down. I am ashamed to have you see me this way. You will think that I am dreadful."

"I don't think it."

Ted knew that there was no use trying to express all that he felt and thought in words. He looked at the girl, and that look told her.

Her eyelids dropped, but she smiled happily.

"I got out, and I took with me these two rifles which I found in the cabin, as well as this belt."

She pointed to a belt filled with cartridges, which she had strapped twice around her waist.

"But how did you come here?"

"I knew a path that would take me to the trail where we were attacked. I was dragged out of the carriage by one of the Mormons, who leaped up behind, while you were holding in the horses. I started back there, but on my way I saw, down through the trees, that they were bringing you back here. It had been my plan to get down to Cimarron, but when I saw you a prisoner I took a short cut that I know. I got here just as they were starting to throw you off."

"And you fired all those shots?"

"Yes, you know that I can handle a rifle. The first time that I ever saw you I thought that I could beat you at shooting, but you beat me. Do you remember?"

"Of course I remember."

"I didn't shoot very well. I fired all the shots as fast as I could, running along to make them think that there was more than one person in the trees."

"You shot to the purpose. But we must go. Here is the buckboard. We can start for Cimarron in that."

"And the sooner we start the better. If the Danites go to the cabin they will find out the mistake that they have made."

"How long will it take them to reach the cabin?"

"An hour at least. They do not know the short cut that I knew and took to this spot. They will ride around by the road."

"Then the sooner we start the better."

The young rough rider stepped to the buckboard and set Jackson free from his bonds.

The boy was pale and shivering, and looked positively sick.

He did not face the gaze of the girl, who turned her head away from him.

Ted felt a certain sympathy for him.

"Get in the back seat," he said. "It will not be long now till you are safe in Cimarron."

They all climbed in, and the girl took the reins, while the young rough rider, with a rifle laid across his knee, scanned the hills for any sign of the Mormon kidnapers.

CHAPTER IX.

THE WARNING.

Early next morning the young rough rider knocked at the door of Mrs. Meeber's house, where he had left Ethel the night before.

As he did so something fluttered from the knob of the door and fell to the ground.

It was a folded sheet of paper.

The young rough rider picked it up and looked at it, for there was something written on it.

When he started to read it, he saw that it was addressed to himself.

Printed on it in rough characters were the following words:

"To Theodore Strong, otherwise known as the young rough rider. Warning!

"You have incurred the enmity of the Mormon Church. You are marked in the book of death. Sooner or later the death angels will come for you. When they come, you will find that you must answer their summons. There is no escaping them when they have visited you. You escaped yesterday, but the trick that saved you is now known. The death angels are watching you all the time. They see your every movement. There is no eluding the Great Eye that seeth everything. There is one chance offered to you. If you do what we command you may escape. Leave this house. Do not enter it. Do not speak to the girl who lives here. Do not attempt to help her in her resistance of the Latter-Day Saints. In that way you may escape. Heed the warning and live. Disobey it and die!"

Ted Strong read this letter through twice, and then glanced around him sharply.

"If they are watching me all the time I will find out where they are now," he muttered to himself.

The land was flat and open for a little way around the house, but at a distance of several hundred yards there was a clump of bushes.

Ted fixed his eyes on this clump of bushes.

He thought that he saw an outline of a figure behind it.

He did not hesitate a moment, but pulling out his revolver, started for it in a hurry.

It is the habit of the young rough rider to meet his foes halfway when they come for him, and it is a habit that sometimes has a very disconcerting effect on the foes.

As he neared the bush, a figure leaped out of it.

It was the kind of a figure that the young rough rider expected to see—that of a pale, bearded man, clad in a long, black coat and wearing a black, slouch hat.

This man did not appear to want to see the boy.

He darted away, and a second later was on the back of a horse, which had been tethered under the trees a little way behind him.

Ted could see him ride off at a gallop.

It was too far to try a shot with a revolver, and the young rough rider never wasted ammunition.

To run after the flying figure would have been useless.

All that Ted could do was to watch the horseman until he disappeared over a rise in the prairie.

Then he turned back toward the house of Mrs. Meeber.

"This is in accord with what I heard in the town," he said to himself. "The Mormons have evidently determined to capture the girl. The wires are cut between this town and the next, and the fact that the railroad has been stopped running for a washout, and that no trains will get here for over a week, will help them all the more. There are few men in the town, as most of the inhabitants are away in mines or on ranches. Ethel is in greater danger than she thinks."

He knocked at the door again, and this time it was flung open.

Ethel herself was at it, smiling and fresh.

"I heard you knock before," she said. "But I was not dressed. You are up early this morning."

"I thought it best to get out early," said the young rough rider, closing the door and stepping inside.

"What is the matter?"

"I just came around to tell you that the Danites have not given up the hope of getting their hands on you."

"What? Have you seen them again?"

"I just chased one from behind the bush out there. He got away from me, though."

Ethel turned a shade paler, and the smile left her face.

The thought of the relentless way in which these Mormons pursued their prey was enough to shock anyone.

She had heard of the secret society of the Danite Kidnapers, and she knew that they had the reputation of never leaving the pursuit until their object was attained.

Cimarron was a lawless town at the best, and the fact that there had been a washout on the railroad a short distance away, made it further from civilization and help than ever.

"What is that that you have in your hand?" she said, looking narrowly at the grave face of the young rough rider.

Ted spread the paper out on the table, and allowed her to read it through.

"Oh, Ted!" she cried, when she had read it. "You are in danger! You must leave me!"

"I'll leave you when you are out of danger—if you want me to. But not before."

"They threaten your life."

"Threatened men live long."

"But I must not drag you into this. Let them take me, or let me escape as best I can. I cannot bear to think of you falling into their hands, Ted."

"I cannot bear to think of you falling into their hands. And you are not going to, either."

"But I must not drag you into this thing. It may mean your life. They say that the Danites always kill those who oppose them."

[illegible] will not kill me or get [illegible]

[illegible] and like a loud knock on the door.

Eth[illegible] it, but the young rough rider held her back with one hand.

"Stay where you are," he said. "There is danger. And do not go near the windows."

"Be careful, Ted," said Ethel, as the young rough rider stepped over toward the door.

Ted was careful

He half expected to find some one at the door when he flung it open.

He stood behind it, and, drawing his revolver with one hand, noiselessly slipped the bolts with the other.

Then, with a sudden movement, he flung the door open wide, standing behind it and ready to fire from his vantage coign at anyone who might attempt to enter.

But there was no one there.

The porch was bare, and there was no one in sight anywhere about.

Thrust in the door, however, as if it had been cast into it with a skillful hand, was a bowie knife.

To the handle of this knife was tied a slip of paper.

The young rough rider, with a sharp twist, pulled out the knife.

It was driven nearly half an inch into the soft wood.

The hand that had thrown it was strong.

He closed the door quickly and stepped inside again.

He drew Ethel close to him in a position where she would be out of range of any of the windows.

Then he untied the piece of paper from the handle of the knife and they read it together.

The message that it contained was printed in the same large type as the former message from the Danites.

It was short and to the point. It was as follows:

"Warning—The first warning is disregarded. This is the last. If you do not leave that house within ten minutes and go to Cimarron and there wait in the hotel, death will be your portion! The Death Angel!"

When they had scanned this message, the girl was pale and troubled while the young rough rider had a confident smile on his face.

"Leave me, Ted," she said. "Save your life."

"Listen," said the young rough rider, laying his arm on her shoulder. "Do not be frightened. "This is a plan to frighten me off, but it will not succeed."

"But what can you do against the Danites, single-handed?"

"I will not be single-handed. Two of my friends, Ben Tremont and Bud Morgan, will arrive here on the Pueblo coach in an hour. They were to meet me here by appointment, although when I made the appointment I did not think that I would need them in this way."

"But what can we do?"

"You must leave this town at once."

"How can I? The railroad has stopped running."

"The coach for Pueblo leaves in a little while."

"I know. It passes the house here. I could get on easily enough. But they might attack the coach."

"That is what they will do—I hope. Then we will catch them. My friends will be on that coach. I will ride behind and out of sight. The Danites will meet with a surprise, I think."

"But you cannot communicate with your friends."

"I can. They will come here. I left word for them to come up on the coach as if they were passengers. I can see them here."

"You planned this all out before?"

"Yes; I did not sleep last night till I had settled what was to be done in this matter. Are all the doors locked?"

"Yes."

"Then go upstairs and tell your cousin that you must both leave on the coach. Tell her what has happened, and hurry. There is not much time for you to get your bags packed up."

"But in Pueblo, where shall we stay?"

"I have friends there who will take care of you. Upstairs, now! and hurry!"

"I'll be quick," said the girl, whose confidence had returned when she saw how coolly the young rough rider treated the matter. "But be careful, Ted. Don't go near any of the windows."

"I'll be careful. But don't you be frightened if you hear a shot and some broken glass down here."

"What are you going to do?"

"Plan a little trick on these Danites—that is all. But hurry."

The girl slipped out of the room and left the young rough rider alone.

CHAPTER X.

FOOLING THE MORMONS.

"Now!" mused Ted, while a sort of grim smile played about his mouth, "I will see if I cannot fool these Danites, wise as they think they are. I think that they can be fooled. I think that the Great Eye that they talk about goes to sleep once in a while, and that this is one of the times."

As he muttered this to himself, the young rough rider was going through a performance that would have surprised Ethel and her cousin had they seen it.

He had first cast a glance around the room and seen that one of the windows was protected by a wooden shutter that was closed outside.

He stood at this window where he could not be seen from any place without the house; but where he could peep through a crack and get a view of what was going on outside.

There was no one in sight, although the bushes not far away might have concealed several people easily.

Standing behind the shutter, the young rough rider quickly slipped off his khaki jacket.

On a lounge beside him were several cushions.

He picked up two of these and stuffed them into the jacket.

He buttoned the jacket, and then poked it this way and that until it had a close resemblance to the shape of a human being.

He laid his hat on the top of this dummy that he had made and fastened his belt around it, to make it still more lifelike.

"Now," he muttered. "We will see whether these fellows are on the lookout for me to appear at one of the windows, as I think that they are. The ten minutes that they gave me to leave the house is about up."

He dropped on his knees and slipped over to one of the open windows, placing the dummy in a chair in front of it. It looked as if it were the young rough rider sitting there with his back to the window.

Fixing it in place, he crept back to his peephole through the crack in the shutter and watched. A moment later there was a flash and a puff of smoke from the bush.

At the same time there was a deafening crash, as the glass in the window that was not protected by the shutter was dashed to flinders. The figure that the young rough rider had made quivered. The young rough rider could see a round hole in the side of the coat, where a bullet had entered the cushions with which it was stuffed.

He reached out with his foot so that the figure toppled to one side.

"Those fellows are good shots," he muttered. "That shows that they don't miss their aim often. It is only right that the man that they fired at should fall. They will show themselves now, if I am not mistaken."

A moment later a black-coated man appeared, peering out from the bush.

He looked carefully at the house and then crept out further.

He was evidently on his guard, as he sneaked closer and closer.

He looked at the shattered window, and as he saw that the figure that he supposed to be the young rough rider, fallen half over on the side he appeared to get more courage.

He straightened up and fired twice more through the window.

Both bullets went to their mark with deadly precision.

Two more holes appeared in the khaki coat.

At the same time a rifle cracked over the head of the young rough rider, and he saw the Mormon suddenly turn and hurry toward the bush.

He had a limp that showed that he had been hit in the leg.

"Take that!" called out the voice of Ethel Winters. "And come back when you want more."

The young rough rider smiled.

"She certainly has pluck," he muttered. "And she is safe at present, for the Mormons will not fire at her. They will take her alive, if they can. They think that I am dead now and there is no doubt that they will be back here as soon as the spy, who was here, reports to them. The coach will be here before they are, though, that is one good thing."

Ethel flung open the door and looked into the room.

She saw the young rough rider standing with his coat off, and her eyes fell on the dummy that lay on the floor now.

Her quick mind took in the idea in an instant.

"I see," she said. "You had them fire at this dummy."

"That was my plan," said Ted.

"They think that you are dead."

"I hope so, and I am going to give them a surprise."

The young rough rider put on his coat again.

"Is there a good horse in that stable out there in the back yard?" he asked.

"There is a little bay that I used to ride. He can travel."

"All right. Is there a man's saddle there?"

"Yes; there is an old cow saddle, with cinches and surcingle hanging up in the stall."

"That is all that I want."

"What do you intend to do now?"

"I intend to let you and Mrs. Meeber go ahead in the coach. We are safe here for the present. That fellow who fired at me has gone back to bring the rest of his gang. The coach will get here before they come, and I will wait till they have ridden after it. They will attack the coach in some lonely spot, and they will get a warmer reception than they are looking for."

"Your friends will be on the roof of the coach?"

"Yes; and I will be riding a short distance behind. Now you understand what the plan is."

"And here is the coach," said Ethel.

"It's on time—if Bud and Ben are there we are all right. Now, run upstairs and tell Mrs. Meeber to get ready."

Mrs. Meeber came downstairs at that moment.

She was pale and frightened.

She did not have the courage and good spirits of her cousin.

Ted, in a few words, explained to her what the plan was.

"It is the only thing to be done," he said. "If the Mormons find you here, they will attack the house, and maybe burn it. In the driver and any passengers of the coach we will have help. We will surprise these fellows surely.

[illegible] re will be no danger for you [illegible] l, and all you will have to do will be to sit still and watch the fun. That is all. You will be safe inside, and, besides that, the Danites will not fire on you. It is their purpose to take you alive—not to kill you."

These words from the young rough rider had a wonderful effect on the widow.

There was something in the presence of the young rough rider that gave her confidence.

She braced up at once.

When the coach drew up at the door, a moment later, she had her valise packed, and was all ready to start. She was still a little nervous.

Before the coach had come to a standstill, two figures had leaped from it and on the porch.

Ted opened the door to meet them.

The first was a slim, wiry fellow, with a head of long, flaxen hair, that would have been the envy of many an actress.

The other was a six-footer, muscular and heavy, who had broken all records at hammer throwing when he was at college.

The first was Bud Morgan, who, before joining the band of the young rough rider, had been a cowboy in the Panhandle.

The other was Ben Tremont.

They were both dressed in the uniform of the young rough riders. They were trusted friends of Ted Strong, and he knew from experience that he could depend upon them in all emergencies.

"Jumpin' sandhills!" cried Bud, taking the hand of the young rough rider, and shaking it up and down as though it were a pump handle. "I air glad ter see yer. Yer look as fit as a filly. What's doin' here?"

"Who is it you want us to scrap?" growled Ben Tremont, in a bass voice.

"What's ther row, anyway?" said Bud. "I'm dyin' fer a scrap."

"We got your note to come up here on the coach, and we left our horses behind at the hotel," said Ben. "What's doing here?"

"Shall we let ther coach go on, er hold it?"

"Did the railroad affair turn out all right?"

"How've yer been since we seed yer last, anyways?"

"What is the meaning of those bullet holes in your coat?"

"Jumpin' sandhills! Has yer been firing a pistil at yer coat?"

The [illegible] questions on the young rough rider [illegible] when Ethel appeared. Then they came to a stop. They had not expected to find a pretty girl in the case. They immediately straightened up and began to arrange their neckties.

Ethel ran toward them with outstretched hands and a smile on her face.

She had met both of Ted's friends before and liked them.

"Jumpin' sandhills!" said Bud, taking both her hands. "Is this ther leetle gal thet useter live up in ther San Jewan Mountings an' shoot deer thar. Ethel, yer has growed more beautiful nor ever."

The cowboy waltzed around the room with her.

"Break away, there!" growled Ben, like a good-natured bear. "Do you want to monopolize all the girls? You ought to have seen him flirt with a girl down in Cimarron, Miss Winters, this morning before he started."

"I'm afraid that you are a gay deceiver," said Ethel, with a laugh.

"Never!" said Bud, indignantly.

"Well, I think that you have held my hands long enough," laughed the girl.

"Here, you," said Ben. "You were always a butt-in."

"Back to the woods, you!" said Bud.

"Give me a chance to speak to Miss Winters."

"Cut it out! She doesn't want to hear you speak."

Ben laid his great hand on the cowboy's shoulder and pushed him into a corner.

"That's where you belong," he said. "In a back seat, and a long way back, at that."

"This is fierce," said Bud. "You always butt in when I'm gettin' next."

"Here," said Ted. "There is some serious business on foot. Listen, fellows. The coach is still waiting, and I want to explain some things to you."

The boys had been struggling together, but now they ceased their horse play and became serious.

"Ain't yer goin' with us on ther coach," asked Bud.

"No; this young lady is going with you."

"Hooray!" said Bud. "Here's where I fascinate her."

"Cut that out," said Ben, "and listen to Ted. There is something doing."

Ted, in a few words, related his adventures with the Mormons. He told about the ruse that he had deceived them with, and of Jackson's part in the affair.

"Jackson is on the coach," said Bud. "He calculated,

I guess, that he wanted to leave these here diggin's as fast as ever he could."

"Now I understand why he looked so glum," said Ben.

"He looks as if all his friends were dead," said Bud.

"Well; he will have to take his chances in the fighting. I want to give you some instructions about this affair."

"Are we to open fire on the Mormons just as soon as they show up?" said Bud.

"No; that is just what you are not to do. They will pretend that they have some right to the girl. They will try to take her away peaceably."

"They will, sure."

"And you want to let them think that they are going to get her at first. Pretend that you are travelers and know nothing about the affair."

"What will we do that for?"

"To get them off their guard. As soon as you find you can get the drop on them, do it. And if there is a fight you will find that I will show up to take a hand in it."

"You bet. Ther young rough rider is allers Johnny on ther spot."

"Who is driving the coach?"

"Kid McCann."

"Good! I know him. He's a good man, and he will help us out in this. Tell him to step inside for a moment. Are there any other passengers besides Jackson?"

"No, not a one."

"All right. Tell McCann I want to speak to him."

McCann dropped off his box and stepped inside.

After him came Jackson.

As soon as he caught a glimpse of the young rough rider, however, he stepped outside.

Ted had given him a severe lecture the night before, and he did not want to see him again.

McCann was a friend of the young rough rider, and it did not take him long to understand what was on foot.

He heartily approved of Ted's plan.

"I've got two guns in my belt and a sawed-off shotgun in the boot of ther old hearse," he said. "When them Mormons starts ter rough-house things, I'll open up on them so that they'll think thet they hev struck a hull battery."

"I guess that we will give them a surprise, all right. They'll be after the coach. I'll wait till I see them pass, and when I ride in on them from behind they will get the surprise of their lives."

The two valises containing the clothes of Mrs. Meeber and Ethel were thrown into the stage, and then the ladies were helped in.

Ted locked up the house and handed the keys to Mrs Meeber.

The Mormons will not disturb your house," he said "They are after you and your cousin. After the railroad runs again and the wires are up there will be a train load of deputies here who will restore order."

"Then we'll be able to come back," said Ethel. "So long, Ted. Be careful of yourself. Don't run into unnecessary danger."

"All aboard," said the driver, climbing up on his perch.

"Where are you going to stay?" said Mrs. Meeber to the young rough rider.

"In the barn," said Ted.

The driver cracked his whip and the team started off.

Everyone on the coach waved a hand, while the young rough rider stepped over to the barn.

No one there noticed that one passenger was missing.

Jackson was not aboard.

He had come on the coach thus far, but now he had disappeared.

No one had noticed his absence.

CHAPTER XI.

JACKSON APPEARS.

Ted went into the barn and saddled up the bay horse that he found there. He also spent some little time in cleaning his revolver and pushing fresh shells into the weapon.

When he had finished cleaning it, he laid it on a box and stepped to the door to look out. He expected to see the Mormons pass soon, on the trail of the coach.

They were in sight already. Four black horsemen pulled up at the house and glanced at it. They did not attempt to enter it, but, after looking at it for a moment, they remounted and rode off.

Ted watched them from his place of concealment behind the stable door.

When they disappeared around a bend of the trail, he turned back into the barn.

As he did so, an unpleasant click sounded in his ears. It was the click of a revolver.

"Up with your hands, rough rider!" came a voice out of the shadows. "You are in my power now."

It was the voice of Cliff Jackson, and there was an exultant ring in it.

Ted could see him now, standing in one of the stalls. He measured the distance. It was too far for a leap. There was a murderous look in Jackson's eyes.

"Up with your hands or I'll fire!" he repeated. Again the weapon clicked.

There was nothing that the young rough rider could do but raise his hands.

"What are you doing here?" he asked, coolly.

He did not show the surprise that he felt, and as for alarm—there was not the faintest trace of it in his bearing or countenance.

"I want to look you over before I talk. Step into that stall there or I'll fire."

Ted hesitated whether to obey or not, and Jackson saw his hesitation.

"If you don't obey, I'll kill you," he said. "I have you in my power. There is no chance of discovery. I mean what I say."

Ted stepped into the stall, and the other stood and looked at him for a moment in silence.

"Now," he said, "I have you in my power."

"What do you mean by detaining me here?"

"A little joke of mine."

"Do you know that the Danites have planned to attack that coach?"

"I know it."

"And I expected to beat off the attack."

"I know that, too. I overheard some of your conversation."

"Are you a party to the attempt to carry off the girl? I thought you had enough of that yesterday."

"I had enough of your infernal talk. I listened to that yesterday till I was sick. I don't want to hear any more of it."

"You'll hear more that you will like still less before you are through," said Ted.

"What are you going to do now?" said Jackson, sneeringly.

"What are you going to do?" said the young rough rider.

"I'll tell you what I am going to do," said Jackson, who had been steadily backing toward the door. "I heard the grand-stand play that you were going to make to rescue that girl. I will do it myself. I'll leave you here. It will be a nice, little joke on you. I'll ride in there and shoot up the Mormons the way that you planned to do it."

"Do you know that there are four to one at present, and that without my aid the Mormons may get the best of it?"

"Bah! You are a big bluff. I'm going to make you look like thirty cents this time. I'll tell the story to Ethel and she will laugh at you."

"I think that I don't need to tell her any stories about you. She has seen enough of you herself."

"I know there is no danger. The Mormons will be beaten before you appear. You will simply not get the glory of it, that's all. I'm going to play your own game and get a little glory myself.

"You beat me and humiliated me yesterday," continued Jackson, after a pause. "I'm going to get square with you. This is only the first of a whole lot of things that I intend to do."

Still covering the young rough rider with his weapon, Jackson reached out with his other hand and dragged the bridle of the bay horse so that it came out of the stall, and then stepped out through the stable door. Jackson was close beside the door now.

"So long," he said. "I hope you will have a good time there."

He slammed the door as he stepped out. He expected that the young rough rider would hurl himself against it, and he busied himself in putting in place a piece of wood that ran through a hasp and staple and held it closed.

But Ted did not hurl himself against the door, as the other had expected. He had been using his eyes while he was standing in the stall with his hands above his head.

He saw that there was a loft to the stable with a window in it.

As soon as the door slammed, and the revolver no longer covered him, he leaped for the top of the stall and caught it in both hands.

He swung himself up on it, and climbed along the top of the partition to the edge of the loft. He clambered out on the loft, made his way through the hay that was stored there, and threw open the window silently.

He looked out and couldt see Jackson below him.

Jackson had made the door fast.

He thought that he had played a neat trick on the young rough rider. He thought that he would be forced to stay in there till some one came to let him out. There was no need for hurry now.

With an expression of great satisfaction on his face, he first looked at the revolver that he had picked up, and thrust it into the side pocket of his coat.

Then he started in to shorten the stirrups.

Although about the same height as the young rough rider, he had not nearly so safe a seat in the saddle. He was laboring under the wrong impression that short stirrups will give a horseman a secure seat.

Ted watched him while he shortened the stirrups on both sides of the saddle.

He was whistling a tune out of a comic opera. He was so engrossed in what he was doing and in his feelings of satisfaction over the trick that he had just played on the young rough rider, that he never thought of looking up.

"Good!" muttered the young rough rider. "He had his laugh at me a moment ago. I think in about half a minute I will have the laugh on him. 'He laughs best who laughs last.'"

The young rough rider climbed out of the window and hung by his hands, looking down. He had not made a sound, and Jackson had no idea that a pair of feet were dangling so near his head. Ted saw that the horse was directly beneath him.

"I've never tried this sort of mounting before," he muttered. "I think I can make it, though. It will scare the animal some, but it will scare Jackson worse."

He was only a few inches above the saddle when he let go his hold.

His feet landed on it lightly.

Then he dropped astride.

Jackson came very near getting a kick in the face, and the horse reared high in the air.

But the young rough rider knew how to control a horse.

Instead of letting it run, he made the animal waltz around in a sort of a circle.

It circled completely around the astonished Jackson, who was so dazed that he could only stare in open-mouthed wonder.

As it did so, the young rough rider reached out and snatched his weapon out of Jackson's belt. A moment later he had quieted his horse and covered Jackson with his gun.

Jackson was staring first at the window and then at the young rough rider in wild amazement. His lower jaw was dropped, and his face looked more foolish, probably, than it had ever looked in all his life.

"I didn't know there was a window," he gasped, without thinking how idiotic the remark would sound.

"No, you didn't know it," said Ted, with a laugh. "But you know it now. I guess that you won't want to tell this story to Ethel as much as you thought that [illegible] long. If you want to [illegible] coach you can."

The young rough rider whirled his horse, clapped his heels to its sides and was away like the wind.

CHAPTER XII.

TED STRONG'S HANDICAP.

"I had a handicap in being held up by that fellow," I said, as he galloped off. "The coach must be a good distance off now, and the Mormons were close behind. It is a race between me and them, with a big handcap against me. If this little horse is any good, however, we may get there in time."

The young rough rider had taken many hard rides, but he had never taken one in which he was in a bigger hurry than the present. He knew that with four Mormons against his two friends and the driver, it might prove a very tough fight, and that his presence alone might turn the scale.

If he did not get there in time, the Mormons might succeed in capturing the coach and getting away with the girl.

He knew that it was a short, sharp dash, and that there was no use trying to save his horse.

He was acquainted with the trail over which the coach must travel, and he let the reins lie loose on the neck of his animal.

Away he flew across the flat prairie, through mottes of timber, and at length up a long rise. From the other side of the rise he heard sounds of firing. He drew his own weapon and drove his spurs into the sides of his horse.

"Just in time!" he muttered. "The horse won out."

* * * * * * *

"Here they come!" The speaker was Bud Morgan.

He was seated with Ben Tremont on the top of the coach. He had been looking back for a long time, expecting to see the Mormons appear on the trail behind.

They had just climbed a long rise and entered a narrow pass on the other side of it when the four black horsemen that the young rough rider had seen pass the Meeber house, hove in sight.

They were coming after the coach, there was no mistake about that.

Bud's eyes sparkled with joy.

If there was anything in the world that this dashing cowboy loved, it was a fight.

The driver cast a glance back.

The horses were going slow and the men behind were coming fast. They drew nearer the coach by leaps and bounds.

The three on the roof did not say much. They kept looking backward at the approaching horsemen.

Suddenly the coach came to a stop. It had struck an obstruction.

The driver wheeled around in astonishment.

Still greater was his astonishment when he saw a black-coated man blocking the trail in front.

He was on foot, and had caught the horses by the bridle.

He covered the driver with a gun. Other figures appeared from the rocks behind him.

Meanwhile the horsemen following the coach spurred forward with wild yells.

There were more Mormons than had been calculated upon. Ted had never thought that another ambush would be laid in the trail for the coach. This is what had happened.

The young rough rider was nowhere in sight. Those three on the roof of the coach were up against terrible odds. There seemed to be no hope for them.

"We're done for," muttered McCann. "There's twice the number that we expected. Our goose is cooked."

The others saw the truth of his words. They knew that there was no use trying to fool these fellows into friendliness.

If they wanted to fight at all, they must fight before the men behind came up. After that there would be no hope. The odds would be too greatly against them.

"Up with your hands!" called the man who held the horses, and who had slipped out on the trail while those on the trail were looking behind. "Resistance is useless. The word of the Danites is law."

"Put up a fight," whispered Bud.

The driver reached for his shotgun, and, at the same time, the man who was holding the horse fired.

Other shots sounded out behind him. There was a rattling volley of them.

McCann fell forward on his seat. Bud and Ben opened fire at the same instant, and every shot of theirs counted. There was a regular fusillade, the two on the coach crouching down and trying to find what shelter they could.

They fired in all directions, swinging their revolvers about. As the four horsemen came up, they met with a volley that made them scatter.

Then the fighting became fast and furious.

The Danites tried to close in on the coach, but they were met with a hail of bullets that seemed to come from a dozen men.

They were drawing nearer again when a volley of shots and a wild yell sounded in the rear. Nearly all of them were wounded as it was.

This new shooting terrified them.

It was terrible in its accuracy. Two of them toppled from the saddle.

A third horse crashed down, pinning its rider beneath it.

The others scattered and those on the coach cheered wildly and poured in a fresh volley.

Ted Strong dashed into the midst of the Danites, firing as he came. A shot struck Crane's horse and it toppled. They scattered before him.

A few moments later the victory was won.

The only Mormons left were those who lay wounded on the ground.

The others had scattered into the hills.

They never knew that it was one boy who had turned the tide of the battle.

They thought in the confusion that he had been leading others behind him.

The speed with which he fired made them think that there were at least a dozen firing at them.

The coach arrived in Pueblo that night with a wounded driver, a pretty girl, a comely, middle-aged woman and three handsome fellows clad in khaki on the roof.

Inside the coach were five wounded men, all prisoners.

Crane was not among them.

His horse had been shot down by the young rough rider, but he had escaped on foot.

Those who were captured were turned over to the United States authorities and afterward tried and sentenced to long terms. Ethel and her cousin enjoyed a delightful visit to Pueblo with the three young rough riders to show them the sights.

When they got back to Cimarron, the town was policed by a vigilance committee which had already succeeded in rounding up several Danites.

Jackson was there no longer. He had started for the East as soon as the trains were running again.

THE END.

Next week's issue, No. 50, will contain "The Young Rough Rider's Daring Climb; or, The Treasure of Copper Crag."

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